

socialist standard

February 2017
Vol. 116 No. 1350
£1.50

Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

Whitehall Warriors

Why there's
panic over
Brexit in the
corridors of
power

PLUS

Undignified on HIGNFY

Thoreau and Minimalism

Assassinations

Chinese Quackery

**MMT:
Money for
Nothing**



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Introducing the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up



capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

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The Proxy War in Syria

WHEN FOREIGN Secretary Boris Johnson rather undiplomatically criticised key British ally, Saudi Arabia, for being amongst those 'puppeteering' in Syria, he blurted out the truth. What has been going on in Syria for the past five or so years has been much more than a civil war. Rival regional powers, as well as the West and Russia, have been intervening both directly and via groups on the ground which they finance and arm.

What started as a bid to spread the so-called Arab Spring to Syria, with the aim of transforming a secular classic dictatorship (one party state, secret police, torture chambers) into a secular political democracy (which would have been a welcome development) was soon hijacked by Islamists of one degree of extremism or another with a quite different agenda. They won the support of the Islamic states, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and of Erdogan in Turkey who would like to turn his country into one too.

With Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey using Sunni Muslim groups as their

puppets and Iran, which supports the Syrian government, using Shia Muslim ones as theirs, the conflict has taken on the appearance of being a religious one. Some commentators have suggested, much more plausibly, that the real issue, for these states at least, has been for control of territory through which an oil pipeline from the Gulf to a Mediterranean port could pass most directly.

For the West and Russia, it has been more a matter of geopolitics. The Syrian government, long controlled by a wing of the Arab Nationalist Baath party, has been sympathetic to Russia since the days of the Cold War, if only because during that period America kept trying to overthrow it. It even claimed to be 'socialist' but only in the sense of running a state-directed capitalist economy as in the former USSR, to which its dictatorial political system was similar too.

Although Syria was not specifically included in Bush's 'axis of evil' it was still regarded as a hostile state deserving regime change. Russia, even though

the pretence of being socialist has (thankfully) been dropped, continued to support the regime, if only to maintain its naval base in the Mediterranean, an objective of the Russian state since the time of the Tsars. For the moment at least, Russia has proved more determined in the defence and pursuit of its interests than the West, and it looks as if the regime is not going to be changed.

These various clashes between rival capitalist interests have led to a minimum of 300,000 being killed, many more injured and much destruction as in the images from Aleppo. Millions more have been displaced both within Syria and as refugees living in misery in camps in Turkey and, if they didn't drown trying to get there, Greece.

As socialists, we place on record our abhorrence of this latest manifestation of the callous, sordid, and mercenary nature of the international capitalist system, while hoping that the fighting, the killing and the destruction stop immediately and unconditionally.

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The Ladybird Book of Revolution

OLDER READERS will recall with fondness their salad days learning to read in the company of nice and respectable middle-class kids Peter and Jane, and Pat the dog. Ladybird has lately achieved renewed prominence with their amusing self-spoofing series for adults covering hangovers, red tape, mid-life crises, throwing a sickie, the people next door and surviving a zombie apocalypse (bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38627650). Having successfully reestablished themselves as nostalgia comedy they've now done a very odd thing. They've let Prince Charles co-write a Ladybird book on climate change.

It's a bit hard to see the thinking here. Ladybird books won't mean anything to today's children, and the retro look surely can't be aimed at them, so Ladybird seem to be suggesting that some adults are too stupid to understand the case for climate action unless it's written by a doddering royal in large type and words of one syllable, and with circa-1960 hand-drawn pictures. Condescending or what, your royal haughtiness?

Of course you can certainly argue that none of us really understand the science, because we're not climatologists. But at the political level the argument is much simpler. Barring a few loony deniers, the entire scientific community is united and unequivocal. There is a problem. The question is what to do about it. There now, that wasn't difficult, was it?

There is something of an elephant lumbering around the environmental

debate which some will be painfully aware of while others may be studiously ignoring it - the lack of participation by what is called the 'traditional working class' (TWC) and the consequent domination of the subject by the cultural middle class (CMC).

These terms require a short digression. Socialists identify two *economic* classes in society which are perpetually at war with each other, the ruling or parasitical class which owns and controls everything but does no real work, and the working class or 99 percent, who control nothing and are economic slaves. One could picture these two classes as opposing trenches on a battlefield. For us there can be no middle class. If there was, it would be standing in No Man's Land getting shot at by both sides.

However most people use the word 'class' in a vaguer *cultural* sense, with all sorts of prejudices and preconceptions attached. It is this world of cultural categories that is at issue here.

Go to any Green party or environmentalist meeting and count the number of people there with university degrees and CMC manners, voices, clothes and social connections. Very often there will be nobody at the meeting who does *not* fit that description, be they TWC, immigrants or other ethnic minorities.

There are three possible explanations for this lack of participation. The first is the one put forward by HRH, in collaboration with Ladybird. The message isn't simple enough.

The second explanation is the one put forward by many sympathetic Greens themselves, as well as politicians and

media pundits, and ably expressed by a British climatologist recently: 'For too long the climate change discussion has been about things that will happen in 100 years time. For economically insecure people, statements about what might happen in 100 years time they just don't care about, because they know these kind of predictions have been proved wrong in the past and will be in the future' (bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-38640413).

One could go further and suggest that people facing a desperate struggle to survive today won't care about anything that's a hundred years away whether the predictions are correct or not. But

while there's obviously some truth in this, it is not the case that concern over the environment is always associated with personal financial well-being, i.e. that having an environmental conscience is somehow a luxury item that the poor can't afford. Many TWC people are not especially poor, have foreign holidays every year and spend a fortune at Christmas, while some people with university backgrounds have no job or money yet still shop ethically, eat tofu and recycle religiously. It's not simply about the money.

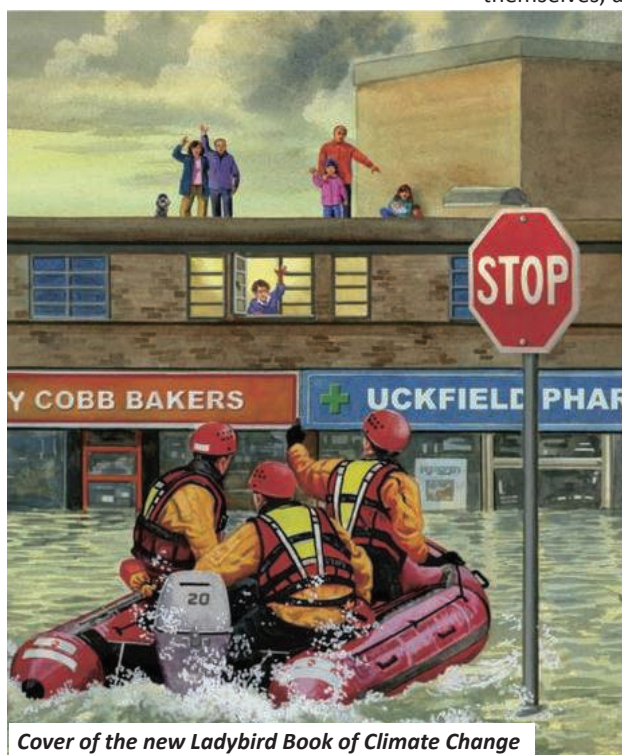
The third explanation is that the TWC are not only not interested in environmental concerns, but actually put off them because of their CMC image. If you live on a council estate, don't have a degree and speak with a local accent, you might very well decide that environmentalism is not for you. You're pretty sure you wouldn't like or relate to anyone, and they wouldn't like you. Your face, voice, clothes, hair and make-up just wouldn't fit. You talk yourself out of being involved.

And are you entirely wrong to do so? Perhaps the uncomfortable truth is that some CMC environmentalists are quite happy in their cosy little clique and would be secretly horrified if it was suddenly invaded by working-class types wearing hoodies and bling and reeking of skunk, or hard-boiled council estate veterans with tattoos on their knuckles. Environmentalism is *Frasier* and *Friends* and *Have I Got News For You?*, not *Eastenders* and *Shameless*.

The problem is the nature of environmentalist politics, which tends to ignore class politics as essentially irrelevant to the debate. We all live on the same planet, runs the thinking, so we should be able to rise above our petty class divisions in order to save it. But that of course is a lot easier to say when you're not the one getting the worst of those divisions and you're not even aware what the worst involves. This is how environmentalism slips into the genteel world of Ladybird, and away from the real and bruising world of class war.

Would it make much difference if environmentalists incorporated class into their world view, given that power resides not with them but with state elites? Well, it would give socialist revolutionaries and environmentalists something in common, and it would make the debate more inclusive, something which needs to happen if anything is ever going to change. You can't wish away class war by ignoring it, but you can wish away a lot of potential support.

PJS



Cover of the new Ladybird Book of Climate Change

His Excellency

I was shocked a few weeks ago when I read the utterances by a Mr. Steve Franke (said to work for a global group) in a local daily. He attributes President Mugabe's socio-economic catastrophe to his Marxism. I wonder if anyone on Earth could be farther from Marxism than Mr. Mugabe: Mr. Trump is much better because he acquired his wealth outside of government office. Our own Mr. Excellency abused Marxism (equality/fairness) to win public support.

If you have access to the likes of Mr. Franke kindly put the following questions: Did not Marx say (if socialism is implemented) the state will wither away? While 99 percent of us (Zimbabweans) are literally starving is not His Excellency building a too large army and police force? Marxism? Add state-of-the-art military academies (and we are not under threat from anyone), new parliament, new capital city etc.

While we starve Mr. Mugabe was among the poor before going into public office, but his cabinet are Christian, did not Marx criticize religion? In fact, what I can say is that Marx overrated influential people's morals and compassion. And while Christ and other religionists were dreamers, mysticists (selfish and arrogant) Marx was the best in terms of ethics, they (gullibly) believe they will join their god in the (imaginary) paradise. Although they now disown each other, law, politics, religion originate together, in a bid to make order to society; tragically the cunning and powerful abused power selfishly. Hence proponents of just, fair and ethical ideals like Marx were condemned while proponents of bigotry/dictatorship like Christ (read, e.g. Matthew 10:34-42 and Luke 9:59-60) are eulogised. An Almighty Dad (if he has the power; love and mercy he is said to have) would never subject his son to barbaric torture.

Instead of facing reality (like Marx), mysticists waste time and resources wrestling an imaginary monster. Thus

the very real monsters abusing power (the bully bigots exploiting and torturing 99 percent of the population) are ignored. Really, some churches are very well organised, help their members in need but, pathetically, if you are going in the wrong direction, you will never get to your destination, however graceful your pace may be.

Bigots wishfully think they can lock reality out of the front door. I am one of the many made destitute when our cruel and selfish leaders forfeited our savings (now I am unemployable due to age). Ironically, His Excellency wants to work beyond 2020, even if he is 25 years older than me, old enough to be my father. But ever since robbing us in 2008/9 they are bombarding us with propaganda 'Empowerment! Zim asset' instead of doing some good to us. They defrauded/robbed in 2008/9, once more they are squandering millions of US dollars telling us how good His Excellency is and how much good is in store for us come 2018.

A week ago: people were tortured and chased by armed police from demonstrating against the bond notes, but the Herald newspaper came out with 'people ignore the planned demo...' Yes, locking reality out of the front door, but they forget we live in the situation, although we have no access to the internet and we cannot afford phones, which can access Facebook, Google etc. Yes, religious propagandists are safer with their acumen to articulate and encourage the suspension of logic, hallucinate and infatuate congregants.

GODWIN HATITYE, Harare, Zimbabwe



'Capitalism and other Kids' Stuff'

Take a fresh look at the world with this DVD from The Socialist Party

See page 7 for details of how to order a copy

Gig economy

Dear Editors

I read the article 'Gigs and Umbrellas' in the December *Socialist Standard*. It was a very good article and made some excellent points about changing workplace conditions for us working folks, but it left out one relevant point that shouldn't be missed.

The last 15 years of my own career as an RN was spent as an independent practitioner for a nursing agency. In this situation, I met only my client(s), not my fellow-independent practitioners working for the same agency. Although independent practitioners generally get less pay and are taxed at a higher rate than other workers, there is little opportunity for them to share complaints about the work, the pay, the treatment received from management, etc.

In addition to all the problems cited by in the article, think of the effect this has on potential union activity: there is neither incentive nor opportunity for independent practitioners to form a union. Each one is an isolated individual. 'Solidarity forever' is becoming passé in this new world order.

Karla Rab, WSP(US)

Reply: Actually there have been attempts in Britain to organise workers who are the 'self-employed' such as motorbike couriers and Uber drivers. See: <https://iwgb.org.uk/>
Editors

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So, you want a revolution?

Worried about the state of the planet and what capitalism is doing to it? Want to do something about it? But what?

- *Burn down a bank, maybe?*

You could do, but there's a lot of banks, and even if you burned them all, they'd just build them again.

- *Kick a copper, perhaps?*

Maybe, but they can kick harder than you can, every time.

- *Bring down the government?*

And get a different government in? Or get martial law?

- *Start a revolution then?*

Now you're talking. But what kind of revolution? That is the question....

Opponents of capitalism are used to having their names dragged through the mud by the state but we don't need

to help the bastards do it in practice. Anybody who kicks in the window of a bank or a fast food joint is handing the state a propaganda victory on a plate.

You can't bring down capitalism in the street. At best you can temporarily annoy it. Is that worth getting busted, or busted up, for? Don't kid yourself that mayhem and rioting is a real threat to capitalism. Modern states have massive coercive power, and they can stand a lot more heat than you can deliver, and they can dish out a lot more heat than you can take.

To be dangerous to capitalism, we have to win the war of ideas, in the newspapers, on TV, amongst our friends and co-workers, in our groups, in our own head. And we have to be united about what we want *after* capitalism, and united about how to get it. Otherwise, the grim truth is that we really won't get past Go.

For a revolution to be any good, you have to be *for* something, besides being against capitalism. Some people are just against big capitalism (WTO, IMF, World

Bank, multinationals, etc) as if somehow 'small' national capitalism is a completely different thing, and perfectly nice. It's not. They're the same. Let's have a definition: capitalism is production for sale on a market with a view to profit.

Instead of that we could have: cooperative production for use and free distribution on the basis of need. This would involve: no markets, no money, no commodities, no private property, no rich class and poor class, no Third World and First World, no profit-led profligacy of any description, no ecological destruction, no famine, and no war.

Think that's unlikely? It isn't. Capitalism has taken us as far as it can go, but there's a lot further we can go without it. It doesn't really matter whether you call it post-capitalism, world socialism, or post-scarcity anarchism, it is feasible and desirable. And given that some scientists are talking about a point of no-return for environmental destruction being reached, the word 'urgent' springs to mind too.



Not the way to win an argument



Abolish money – but not now

SOCIALISTS WANT to see money disappear, because of the rationing it means for most people, but only as a consequence of the establishment of the common ownership of the means of wealth production. This, in enabling production to be carried on to directly meet human needs, would render money redundant. With the end of production for the market and of buying and selling, there would be no need for money.

We do not envisage the 'abolition of money' with nothing else changing, i.e. its abolition while the rest of the economy remains capitalist. That would lead to chaos and hardship, as was seen when at the beginning of November the Indian government suddenly announced that all 500 and 1000 rupee notes (worth £6 and £12 respectively) still in circulation at the end of the year would be cancelled. Since these were used to carry out some 85 percent of cash transactions in India this was tantamount to abolishing 85 per cent of money. So as not to lose out, Indians had to exchange any such notes at a bank by that date.

Marx once remarked that, while no kind of bank legislation could eliminate a money crisis, 'ignorant and mistaken bank legislation' could intensify one (Capital, Vol. III, ch.30). What happened in India has proved his point. According to Ed Conway, Sky News's economics editor writing in the *Times* (23 December), as less than half of Indians have bank accounts, this measure, aimed at catching tax dodgers and money launderers, hit the poorest half of Indians the most:

'The real victims of demonetisation are not wealthy ne'er-do-wells, who long ago shifted their money out of cash and into other currencies and assets: gold, Treasury bonds, apartments in London and New York. No, the real victims are, as so often, the poor.'

So, no, we are not envisaging the abolition of money within capitalism.

Meanwhile, in a more advanced part of the capitalist world, in Seattle on the West Coast of the USA:

'Amazon has unveiled its first bricks and mortar grocery store, which does away with tills and queues and lets shoppers grab what they want and stroll out' (*Times*, 6 December).

That's more like what we envisage happening in socialism, except that, under capitalism, it is not as simple as that – the shoppers still have to pay in the end:

'Shoppers will be billed using an array of cameras and sensors tracking their every move ... Customers will need to download an Amazon Go app and tap in with their phone at special barriers when they enter, then they can take what they want from the shelves and walk out. When a customer leaves the shop the app adds up their purchases and charges their Amazon account.'

No doubt, in socialism, in some stores in some parts of the world, electronic devices will help stock control by automatically noting what has been taken, but there will be no need to record what each particular individual has taken, only what has been taken in total over a given period.

Conway, whose article is headed 'Cash belongs in the past so let's abolish it', favours a cashless society because this would be 'a hammer blow to the black market and the corrupt criminals and cronies who benefit from the anonymity of paper money.' But the price would be an increase in the surveillance state in which the authorities would be able to know how all of us spent our money. Besides, some geniuses have invented an anonymous electronic money – bitcoins -- another waste and misapplication, alongside Amazon's app, of human ingenuity and IT brought about by capitalism.



Laughter At A Price

Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough! It isn't fit for humans now, There isn't grass to graze a cow. Swarm over, Death!

WAS JOHN Betjeman's 1937 despairing plea to Europe's rampant air forces to put a halt to the menacing industrialisation of that Berkshire town with its vulgar profiteers but to spare the bald young clerks who add those profits. But it was not long after this that Slough nurtured a young man whose talents as a cartoonist were devoted to exposing the very social structure and circumstances that Betjeman despaired of: *It's not their fault they do not know The birdsong from the radio*. Steve Bell was raised in Slough at the grammar school where he enjoyed the Art lessons (and the novels of P.G. Wodehouse) but had something of a conscientious objection to being duffed up on the rugby field. So he moved up north where he could develop his illustrative skills along with burgeoning passions for left wing protest to the point that when his work was published worldwide, he was decorated with numerous honorary degrees and repeatedly named as Cartoonist of the Year. Early on in his time he fathered a succession of characters such as David Cameron as a speaking condom, Harry Hardnose as a newspaper editor and Able Seaman Kipling aboard a Royal Navy warship in the Falkland war. Such disrespect for the noble, enriched eminences of the social system of class was bound to provoke outrage, which served only to emphasise the truth that Bell at his most perceptively offensive was merely illustrating with an unfailing eye the facts of capitalism in its exploitation, cruelty and deceit.

HIGNFY

In whole this process is often referred to as satire, which can yield an impressive income when it is transmitted in the right place and time. For example there was the television programme *Have I Got News For You* (HIGNFY) – a kind of panel game in which two personalities – Ian Hislop and Paul Merton, each with a partner, presented themselves to ameliorate popular dismay at some current events by exploiting anything about them liable to cause a laugh. Between these two, as a kind of conductor orchestrating the laughter, was Angus Deayton. There were

rumours that Hislop and Merton were resentful of the fact that Deayton was paid £50,000 for each programme, which was a great deal more than they got. There was some concern that they took their revenge on him when in October 2002 he was sacked after big headline revelations in the red top press that he was in the regular habit of taking drugs such as cocaine and using a succession of prostitutes – all of which was officially beyond the bounds of the programme. But HIGNFY has lost none of its appeal since then.

Straight Women

One of its recent victims was Nicky Morgan, the Tory Minister and MP for Loughborough. Among her ministerial jobs was in 2013 as Economic Secretary to the Treasury and soon afterwards Minister for Women – excluding the bit in the title about Equalities – which was said to be due to her voting against the proposal for same-sex marriages which, said her detractors, made her just the Minister for Straight Women. She was locked in an enduring clash with Minister of Education Michael Gove over his proposals which did not prevent her supporting his later bid to become Tory leader. On another matter she accepted donations from a constituent who was at the head of a local radio programme and of a company specialising in security – which involved spying on other political organisations in order to develop legal advice to be passed to the opposition.



Trousers

These events were politically undermining, keeping Morgan in an uncomfortable spotlight and some of her comments led to her leader Theresa May issuing terse instructions that a person she identified as 'that woman' should not be admitted to any cabinet meetings discussing Brexit. Then Morgan made matters worse by sneering at May after she had posed on a couch wearing – or perhaps 'displaying' would be a more appropriate word – glamorously patterned leather trousers. The news that this garment had cost £995 did not help May's efforts to persuade us that she stands for

a government of the ordinary hard working struggling folk; even worse that the people who make the trousers in some Far Eastern sweat shop

are paid some £1.49 an hour. Dismissing Morgan from the government did not cost anything like that and amid the uproar it was overlooked that Morgan was herself not averse to a bit of expensive leatherwear because she is often seen carrying her bits and pieces in a handbag made of the stuff, which at £950 had cost almost as much as May's legwear. Morgan's response to this humiliation was to withdraw from a pending appearance as one of the panel alongside Paul Merton on HIGNFY. Perhaps she did this in the hope of keeping a low profile but that did not happen because the programme responded by substituting her handbag.

Hattersley

That was just one example of how HIGNFY might keep its reputation for ruthless responses to popular politicians who reject an opportunity to appear with them. There was Roy Hattersley, or Baron Hattersley PC FRSL, who when he refused to appear was not substituted by costly luggage but by a tub of lard – which was justified by Paul Merton on the grounds that there were similarities in appearance and style of operation. Hattersley first came into Parliament in 1964 as MP for Birmingham Sparkbrook. He had previously failed to win at Sutton Coldfield in 1959. He then devoted considerable energy to being selected for another seat, trying twenty-five constituencies until he was accepted at Sparkbrook and went on to win there. During his time in the Commons he held a variety of shadow and ministerial jobs and after Labour's disastrous defeat under Michael Foot in 1983 he became Deputy Leader under Neil Kinnock, who was Party Leader until he had his own disaster in 1987. Alistair Darling admired Hattersley and '...enjoyed working with (him). He is good company, convivial and thoughtful'. He remembered the advice Hattersley gave him in 1988 after inviting him to join his shadow Home Affairs team: 'You'd better remember that in politics there is no such thing as gratitude'. Which should have counted when Leo McKinstry in *The Spectator* derided him as '...this charmless figure of epic mediocrity'.

Laughter may be a defence against the essential nature of a social system which judges everything through a price and when profit can be reaped from the sale of entertainment. To change that would really be News For You.

IVAN

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Traditional Chinese Medicine: *cheaper and nastier*



MANY PRACTITIONERS of 'complementary and alternative medicine' such as homeopathy claim and seek that the state should support those treatments financially. One such unorthodox medical model was in fact sponsored by a government, not due to a proven track record but inspired by political necessity. Mao Zedong explained his support for Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in a 1950 speech:

'Our nation's health work teams are large. They have to concern themselves with over 500 million people [including the] young, old, and ill. ... At present, doctors of Western medicine are few, and thus the broad masses of the people, and in particular the peasants, rely on Chinese medicine to treat illness. Therefore, we must strive for the complete unification of Chinese medicine' (From Kim Taylor's *Chinese Medicine in Early Communist China, 1945-1963: A Medicine of Revolution*).

Of course, this improvised health service was not suffice for the Chinese Communist Party leadership, themselves.

'Even though I believe we should promote Chinese medicine. I personally do not believe in it. I don't take Chinese medicine.' Mao is quoted as saying. (*In the Private Life of Chairman Mao* by Li Zhisui, one of Mao's personal physicians)

Inconsistent texts and idiosyncratic

practices had to be standardised.

Textbooks were written that portrayed Chinese medicine as a theoretical and practical whole, and they were taught in newly founded academies of so-called 'Traditional Chinese Medicine.' Needless to say, the academies were anything but traditional, striving valiantly to 'scientify' the teachings of the accepted 'wisdom' that often contradicted one another and themselves. The belief running through all aspects of TCM is the notion of qi, an energy life-force that flows through everything. Science-based medicine does not recognise qi energy because there is no convincing empirical evidence that such a thing exists. Nor is there any evidence for the alleged meridians or channels in the body where qi flows that can become blocked and which can be unblocked through acupuncture to allow qi to flow freely and restore health.

TCM advocates point to the thousands of herbs and plants used in treatments and it has never been disputed that a great number of these do have health benefits. However what is surprising from those proponents of TCM in the West is the silence about the use of animal parts. Throughout Asia, thousands of bears are kept in tiny cages their entire lives so that their gall bladders can be tapped for bile. Bear bile has always been a popular ingredient in TCM and is used for many

ailments from hemorrhoids to hepatitis. Because only small amounts of bile are used in TCM, there is now a surplus of bear bile so bear farmers have also begun producing shampoo, wine, tea, and throat lozenges containing bile.

Extraction of a bear's bile is done in a process called 'milking,' which is performed twice daily. A catheter is surgically implanted into the bear's abdomen. Veterinarians rarely perform this surgery, which results in roughly half of the bears dying from infections or other complications. Bile is then drained from the catheter and collected by the farmer. Milking begins at age three, and continues for a minimum of five to ten years. Some bears who have been rescued were found in cages producing bile for twenty years or more. The Chinese government banned the use of the catheter method of bile collection in favor of the 'free drip' method which involves surgery to create an open hole in the bear's abdomen through which bile freely drips out. This was touted as more humane, yet is as inhumane for bile often leaks into the bear's abdomen, which increases rates of infection and mortality. Farmers have trouble keeping the hole open. This results in more painful surgery, and often the implantation of a small catheter to keep the hole permanently open. The filthy conditions on most farms lead the bears to suffer from further infections, worms, and other parasites. The bears' muscles atrophy from confinement in such small cages for the duration of their lives. They are also extremely malnourished from a diet of grain mash or porridge, and their teeth and claws are often removed to prevent injuries to the farmers.

Overall, the worldwide trade in bear parts, including bile, is estimated to be a \$2 billion industry. Research from 2007 shows its profitability: while the wholesale price of bile powder is around US\$410 per kg in China, the retail price increases exponentially to 25 to 50 fold in South Korea, and to 80 fold in Japan. The demand for animal products continues to grow as the worldwide interest in 'alternative' medicine grows. The impact of TCM goes well beyond bears and as we know affects tigers and rhinos, amongst many other animal species.

ALJO



Dissing the Establishment

The resignation of the UK's chief representative to the EU, Ivan Rogers, gives us an unusual glimpse into the inner workings of government. His very public (if formally veiled) criticisms of government ministers goes against the normal practice of confidentiality and secrecy that lies at the heart of the relationship between civil servants and ministers. This suggests not only a breakdown of the machinery of government, but also highlights the changes of the personnel in office, as well as the enormous difficulty of the choices facing politicians in charge of responding to the Brexit vote. The UK civil service has been in existence since 1855, established to provide permanent personnel to administer government, and to end corruption and patronage, following the Northcote-Trevelyan Report. This provided for civil servants to be permanent and impartial, serving through changes in ministry, irrespective of the political complexion of the government of the day. The watchword became that civil servants advise, and ministers decide.

Compare this to the United States, where the President appoints most senior offices directly, and Donald Trump has simply handed direct control of the state to people who are themselves direct capitalists: giving state power to one faction of the capitalist class and a world class opportunity for industrial scale corruption.

The UK system worked reasonably well, within its own terms, providing professionalism at the heart of the increasingly complex government machine, as the size of the state expanded through the first half of the 20th century. In socialist terms, we understand the state to be the executive committee of the ruling class, the capitalists. The permanent Civil Service, however, did not have to come from individuals who were themselves personally capitalists (indeed, an absence of a personal business interest meant that they could effectively remain neutral between business interests). The civil servants, however, did remain personally close to

the established interests of the country, going to the same schools and universities, intermarrying with their families and pursuing the same hobbies, entertainments and social activities: all the superficial markers that some associate with the 'upper classes' of British society.

This came to be termed 'the Establishment' in the 1960s, a term which is useful for every outsider group to rail against, not least because of the looseness of its definition. Everyone currently in office becomes 'the Establishment' by default. Obviously, in the UK this appearance was aided by the rump hereditary aristocracy that continued to haunt the corridors of power, providing many of the personnel for the lumpen political class. Within these terms, the 'chummocracy' of David Cameron was a last hurrah for such an 'Establishment'.

Today's lumpen politicians come through slightly different structures: the established political parties provide career routes (start as an intern, advisor, get a council seat, stand for parliament), and they are kept in touch with the wider needs of the capitalist class through the open corruption of the revolving door, where politicians go on to work as directors or advisors to firms with links with the government, or on the boards of charities and quangos.

Saloon bar bores

The fallout from Brexit is that the Saloon Bar Bore wing of the Tory Party has had power fall into its lap. The wider chummocracy has always been largely value-free: believing only in taking and holding office for its own sake. To do that, they've needed to recruit true believers, people who can convincingly reach out to win the electoral coalition needed to get to office: otherwise known as fruitcakes and headbangers. Professional ideologues, often from outside the social circles of the 'Establishment', they espoused the necessary Euroscepticism and free market fundamentalism to keep the shopkeepers, farmers and associated big fish in small ponds

onside.

Now that they are in charge, they are coming up against both the received wisdom of the bureaucracy of state, as well as the enduring interests of many very large and wealthy firms, not to mention the competing interests of capitalists within a large and necessarily byzantine international structure. So, they are taking to shooting the messenger, and blaming the officials. Further, faced as Theresa May is with making some difficult and potentially career-ending choices, she has taken the best politician's way out: and avoided taking those choices for as long as possible.

Rogers' farewell missive ended with a reaffirmation of the traditional role of the civil servant:

'I hope you will continue to challenge ill-founded arguments and muddled thinking and that you will never be afraid to speak the truth to those in power.

I hope that you will support each other in those difficult moments where you have to deliver messages that are disagreeable to those who need to hear them.

I hope that you will continue to be interested in the views of others, even where you disagree with them, and in understanding why others act and think in the way that they do.'

The only extraordinary thing about that is that basic principles only need to be publicly asserted when they are under strain. The clear point is that it has been taken by most observers to mean that the ministers Rogers has had to deal with have been displaying muddle-headed thinking with ill-founded arguments. Put another way, the rational point of view of the outsiders is greatly at odds with the rational point of view of career civil servants and the general interest they represent. That, far from being permanent, Rogers has had to go, indicates where the real balance of power lies, and it is with the elected side of the state, not the entrenched bureaucracy as some like to believe.

Panic on the bridge

Rogers' letter also shows how difficult the Brexit planning is, as he notes:

'We do not yet know what the government will set as negotiating objectives for the UK's relationship with the EU after exit.'

Given formal notice of Brexit is due to be given next month, this is an incredible thing to be saying. Senior diplomatic staff cannot function without direction being given from the very top. If May is not only hiding her

"Free trade does not just happen when it is *not* thwarted by authorities: increasing market access and consumer choice depends on the deals that we strike, and the terms that we agree"

negotiating strategy from the public, but also from the officials most in need of political direction, that is a clear sign that it is not Machiavellian, high stakes poker bluffing that is going on, but blind political panic. Clearly, the Saloon Bar Bores, finding themselves in office, worry they may not be in power.

The real gem given to us by Rogers is this:

'Contrary to the beliefs of some, free trade does not just happen when it is not thwarted by authorities: increasing market access to other markets and consumer choice in our own, depends on the deals, multilateral, plurilateral and bilateral

that we strike, and the terms that we agree.'

This is not the voice of a theoretician, but a practical hands-on international trade negotiator. This has been the socialist case for decades: that markets are not spontaneous, but stem from the infrastructure put in place by the politically dominant class to serve their interests. It is this reality that is coming into hard collision with the utopians and ideologues who have made up the backwaters of the Tory party. They need to believe that markets just happen when people are left alone by the state, that they are the natural state of hard-working responsible individuals, because that is the attractive and (in some ways) egalitarian appeal of capitalism to those who are not themselves capitalists ('it could be you, if you work hard enough') and the ideological stick used to justify attacking welfare and the public sphere.

It is this contrast between the Tory utopians (and the small proprietors whose worldview they most closely match) and the big capitalists with their global worldview that lies beneath much of the current upheaval in politics. In the end, the Saloon Bar Bores will find that the enemy is not 'The Establishment', but the wealth and power of bigger capitalists, and they will have to accommodate to the needs of British industry and finance, one way or another, probably wrapped up in Union Flag gift paper. Otherwise they would need to mobilise a nationalist force. Such a movement would also have to shackle the working class and any large scale union activity. Either way, they have nothing to offer the working class, other than not being the current 'Establishment' that oppresses them.

Unlike leftists and populists, socialists do not look to the superficialities of the Establishment theory, and its personnel, but look to the actual underlying class interests that structure society. Whoever's name is on the brass plate of public office, they are going to have to find themselves working in such a way as to protect profits. At most they can play one interest off against another, to persuade us all to join in the bunfight.

The lesson is clear, then. Fundamental change cannot happen without the exercise of political power, and cannot happen without depriving capitalists of their property and profits.
PIK SMEET

MMT

New theory Old illusion

We look at the latest economic theory to claim that governments can spend their way to full employment.

In 1971 the last formal link between paper currencies and gold came to an end when the US decided to end the convertibility, for foreign governments, of the dollar into gold at \$35 an ounce. Before then the currencies of IMF member countries had been tied indirectly to gold by having a fixed rate of exchange with the dollar. This change meant that governments no longer had to take into account maintaining the dollar rate of exchange when making economic decisions.

The link had only been for the purpose of international trade. Internally, all currencies, including the dollar, had been, since at least the beginning of WW2, what the Americans call 'fiat' money, from the Latin for 'let it be done'. Fiat money is government-created money that cannot be converted on demand into a fixed amount of gold or silver, as was the case in most countries up until WW1. The amount that is issued is a government decision, whether taken by the Treasury or the central bank.

The fact that the amount of money in circulation is at the government's discretion does not automatically lead to inflation, as a rise in the general price level, i.e. of all prices. What it does mean is that, to avoid this, the government has to estimate the amount of currency that the economy needs to pay for goods and services, settle debts, pay taxes, etc, and issue only the amount required for this. Inflation will only result if the government issues more than this. In practice governments everywhere did this to varying degrees; hence the non-stop rise in the general price level in all countries since 1940.

Who needs deficits?

In the 1990s a new school of monetary economics emerged calling itself "Modern Monetary Theory" (MMT). Its exponents claimed that a fiat money that wasn't tied to a fixed rate of exchange with another currency gave governments much more potential control over the economy. For them 1971 is year zero as it meant that from then on governments could issue as much money as they wanted and need not be constrained by lack of finance; they could spend as much as they want on whatever they choose by simply creating the fiat money to do it.

As one of them, Dale
Pierce, put it:
"The essential
insight of
Modern



Monetary Theory (or "MMT") is that sovereign, currency-issuing countries are only constrained by real limits. They are not constrained, and cannot be constrained, by purely financial limits because, as issuers of their respective fiat-currencies, they can never "run out of money." (neweconomicperspectives.org/2013/03/what-is-modern-monetary-theory-or-mmt)

They challenged the view that governments can spend only what they raise from taxes or borrow. According to them, governments don't need to have recourse either to taxation or to borrowing; they can simply create the money to spend; the budget deficit (the difference between what a government raises in taxes and what it spends, which is filled by borrowing) is a non-issue.

They go on to argue that, if a budget deficit exists, this is because a government has deliberately chosen not to use the power that they have to create money; unemployment only exists because a government has decided as a matter of policy not to create the money to put the unemployed to work.

As Pierce put it, MMT means that

'no such sovereign government can be forced to tolerate mass unemployment because of the state of its finances – no matter what that state happens to be ... A currency-issuing government can purchase anything that is for sale in its own currency, including the labor of every last unemployed person who is still looking for a job. So, a key policy recommendation of Modern Monetary Theory is the idea of a "Job Guarantee".'

What matters is:

'whether there are enough real resources available to produce goods and services that are equal in value to the government's job-guarantee spending. If these resources are available – if they are not already being used to produce something else – then the increased demand that results from the payment of job-guarantee wages will not be inflationary, regardless of what they go to produce.'

After reading this article, Richard Murphy, the tax accountant who has appointed himself an unofficial adviser on economics to Corbyn, exclaimed that it had taken him 'a little while to realise that I am what is now called a Modern Money Theorist.' There are members in Momentum, Corbyn's support

group in the Labour Party, promoting MMT.

No wonder. Such a theory is bound to be attractive to those who think that capitalism can be reformed to work to everyone's benefit. But there's nothing 'modern' about it. It's an old illusion of those who see unemployed workers and idle resources alongside unmet needs and think that the obvious solution is simply for the government to create and spend more money. Various schools of currency crankism have been proposing this since the first capitalist economic downturn in 1825. To be fair, MMT rejects the view that banks can create money out of nothing; they correctly say that only a government can.

Would it work?

It's an attractive theory, but is it valid? Would it work as envisaged?

It is true that – in theory – a government doesn't have to resort either to taxation or to borrowing to finance its activities. It could simply print the money and spend it. This is a practice more associated with countries like Zimbabwe, but it could be done in Britain even if, when first implemented, it would provoke a financial crisis and in all probability an economic downturn too.

The way it is supposed to work is that the government introduces money into the economy through the wages and salaries of its employees, state pensions and other benefits, and what it pays its contractors; these then spend it, stimulating the growth in the rest of the economy, out of which the government eventually recoups most of the money via taxes. This is an odd way of describing how the economy works, putting the cart before the horse (government spending before taxation) and making the tail wag the dog (government spending driving the economy rather than factors within the economy itself).

In fact of course it assumes that the real economy – where wealth and value are actually produced – is already operating, so what the government would be doing is buying some of the goods and services produced there. It also assumes that the government has already been financed from taxation or borrowing.

An economy operating normally generates, when new goods are produced, new spending power as wages and profits roughly in tandem with new market value created (new things worth buying). The whole of one more or less adds up to the whole of the other, like a pair of balanced scales. If the government starts injecting extra spending power in the form of new money into the economy which is over and above the total value, the scales will tip, more money will chase goods of a lesser total value, and inflation will result.

The proponents of MMT deny this when there are resources that are underused and people who are unemployed. They argue, as Pierce above that, in these circumstances, the extra government-created money would go towards using these unused resources and employing the unemployed to create an equivalent amount of new value. But they are ignoring the reason why these resources and people are unused in the first place, which is that the market does not recognise any profitability in employing them. This is the cruel fate of many workers who have struggled to pay for their own training and skills only to find that the market does not want them, even though their skills would be considered useful by any sane person. Capitalist economics is not interested in what is useful, it only cares what is profitable.

We've heard this idea before of course. It's the classical Keynesian argument, though they envisaged the extra government spending being financed by running a budget deficit and financing it by borrowing rather than by simply

printing more money.

When put to the test, in the 1970s when the post-war boom began to peter out, Keynesianism didn't work. The economy remained stagnant and the result was to add inflation to it, a state of affairs that came to be described as 'stagflation'.

A slowdown, a standstill or a downturn in production is not caused by a lack of spending power but by a decline in profitable things for capitalists to spend money on. When this happens, it seems as if there's not enough spending money, whereas in fact money is being kept in the pockets of the capitalists because they see nothing worth investing in.

The only way out is for profitability to be restored. The government can help this to some extent by cutting taxes on profits but this means that, with less income from taxation, it has to cut rather than increase its spending. Other factors such as the clearance of stocks, bankruptcies, capital depreciation, lowered interest rates, and reduced real wages will be more important. These are what will restore profitability and eventually re-stimulate the economy and move it on to the



next-stage of its regular boom/slump cycle.

Keynesianism did not work and there is no reason to suppose that MMT would either. The government pumping more money into the economy would just cause inflation, whatever the stage of the cycle. MMT is in fact in the Keynesian tradition, regarding itself as part of 'post-Keynesian' economics and advocating the same policies – counter-cyclical government spending and job creation – , the only difference being in how they think this should be financed.

Capitalism runs on profits

MMT's fundamental flaw is its assumption that the capitalist economy is geared to meeting paying needs – that, as Warren Mosler, the founder of MMT, has put it, 'capitalism runs on sales'. Capitalism does of course need sales but profitable ones. It is not simply a system of production for sale, but of production for sale with a view to profit. It runs on profits and is driven by investment for profit, not people's consumption nor government spending.

This is something governments have to recognise and, on pain of provoking an economic downturn, give priority to profits and conditions for profit-making. It's why governments have to dance to capitalism's tune. No government can make capitalism work for the benefit of all. The ending of any link with gold has not given governments any more control over the economy than they had before. Pouring newly-minted money onto one side of the scales is not a magic way to balance the books, no matter what the MMT gurus say, and governments will resort to it at their peril.

ADAM BUICK



A Walden Ponder

- Thoreau and Minimalism

Henry David Thoreau, born two centuries ago in Massachusetts, rebelled against a treadmill existence of toil and tedium. What can we learn from his 'experiment' in simple living?

This year marks the bicentennial of the birth of Henry David Thoreau, best known as the author of *Walden*, a book that recounts lessons learned from two years of simple living in a cabin the author built on the banks of Walden Pond, not far from his home in Concord Massachusetts.

'I went to the woods', Thoreau explains in *Walden*, 'because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach'. Convinced that 'our life is frittered away by detail', he took as his motto, 'simplicity, simplicity, simplicity', seeking to reduce his needs to what he saw as fundamental, and thereby limiting the time spent laboring to meet those needs and expanding his personal freedom. What Thoreau sought was not the 'freedom to be lazy', however, but a way to 'live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.'

His ideal of 'Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose' amidst the 'chopping sea of civilized life,' with its 'incessant influx of novelty,' seems all the more attractive today when the 'hurry and waste of life' that he had railed against has reached a proportion that Thoreau could not have imagined.

Trivial Pursuits

Looking back, Thoreau's age may seem quaint now and to have required hardly any further simplification, but that is really our illusion. The same sort of trivia and tedium that distracts and demoralizes us today was already widespread in mid-19th century America. The mania for news, for instance, afflicted the minds of most Americans, as Thoreau writes:

'After a night's sleep the news is as indispensable as the breakfast. "Pray tell me anything new that has happened to a man anywhere on this globe!"—and he reads it over his coffee and rolls, that a man has had his eyes gouged out this morning on the Wachito River; never dreaming the while that he lives in the dark unfathomed mammoth cave of this world, and has but the rudiment of an eye himself'.

With regards to a proposed trans-Atlantic telegraph cable, Thoreau remarks, 'We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the old world some weeks nearer to the new; but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad,

flapping American ear will be that the Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough'.

These passages, which give a taste of the satirical streak that runs through *Walden*, bring to mind our own age which groans under the dead weight of celebrity chitchat and trivia. The difference between now and then is just a matter of degree. Tuning out most of the news, which he viewed as mere 'gossip', was one way that Thoreau hoped to leave his mind free to pursue worthier matters.

When it came to his reading material, Thoreau guarded the entrance to his mind with an extreme vigilance, only granting entry to the classics, by his own account. But anyone who has entered a zombie state after succumbing to too much click-bait can appreciate the benefits of consuming news in smaller portions.

Working Now, Living Later?

In *Walden*, Thoreau bemoans how people put off living their lives in favor of 'earning a living'. He writes: 'But men labor under a mistake . . . By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal. It is a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before'. Thoreau derides people who are 'Spending of the best part of one's life earning money in order to enjoy questionable liberty during the least valuable part of it.'

This tragic waste of time is all the worse, Thoreau argued, because the labour that must be performed to earn that living usually brings little if any personal fulfillment and satisfaction to the labourer, who 'has no time to be anything but a machine'.

The late 1840s, when Thoreau was living at Walden Pond, was the beginning of industrialization in the northeast of the country. Forests were being rapidly felled, railroad lines built, and factories were popping up all over the place. Thoreau observes the working conditions of textile factory 'operatives' at the time were nearly as bad as those in England, and not surprisingly, since 'the principle object is . . . unquestionably that corporations may be enriched'.

He was horrified by the tedious, one-dimensionality of work, arising from the increasing division of labour, and wondered:

'Where is this division of labor to end? And what object does it finally serve? No doubt another *may* also think for me; but it is not therefore desirable that he should do so to the exclusion of my thinking for myself'.

Toward what end? – That is the question Thoreau is always posing. The benefits in increased production from a system that turns the worker into a mere labouring machine seemed very dubious to him.

Meaningful Work, Useless Toil

In focusing his attention on the quality of the work, rather than the quantity of the outcome, Thoreau views are similar in some important respects to those of William Morris expressed in his talk 'Useful Work Versus Useless Toil'. There Morris writes, 'To compel a man to do day after day the same task, without any hope of escape or change, means nothing short of turning his life into a prison-torment. Nothing but the tyranny of profit-grinding makes this necessary'.

Thoreau would have agreed heartily with that view of Morris, as well as his contention that no work can be meaningful unless the worker has some hope of occasional rest and of pleasure in the work itself, as well as some tangible outcome from the effort made.

Both Morris and Thoreau held the same strong aversion to the separation of physical and mental labour that prevailed in their time as in ours. And the mechanically skilled Thoreau, like the artist Morris, preferred to earn a living through work that engaged his body and his mind, working as a land surveyor or manufacturing pencils for his father's business, while setting aside his nights to keep the journal that served as the raw material for *Walden* and other books and essays.

Thoreau thought that engaging in physical labour and outdoor activity had a salutary effect on one's writing as well. He recommends in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* that 'steady labor with the hands, which engrosses the attention also, is the unquestionably the best method of removing palaver and sentimentality out of one's style, both writing and speaking', adding that, 'We are often struck by the force and precision of style to which hard-working men, unpractised in writing, easily attain when required to make the effort'.

But of course there is a limit to the benefits of physical labour, and in the case of the exhausted worker, he writes in *Walden*, 'Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much' to be able to pluck the 'finer fruits' of that labour.

Thoreau sought to steer clear of the extremes of the idle scholar or over-worked labourer, believing that 'The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly'.

Not Political but Radical

Thoreau was living at a time when, at least in the United States, there was no movement on the horizon that sought to end the alienation of labour and class conflict that prevented both ruler and ruled from easily exercising body and brain; and not surprisingly since capitalism was only beginning to take root in certain parts of the country. Even if there had been such a movement, it seems doubtful that Thoreau would have been among its first converts, since politics was something he largely shunned along with the news.

He did support the abolitionist movement, as many of his friends and family members did, and rose to defend John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry at a moment when that was an unpopular opinion in the north. But Thoreau was never an activist in the movement.

To his credit, though, Thoreau was not the sort of abolitionist who naively assumed that the body politic would have a clean bill of health once chattel slavery was uprooted. He recognizes in *Walden* that 'there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both north and south' and that perhaps the worst of all forms of slavery is when 'you are the slave-driver of yourself'.

Thoreau thus points out that chattel slavery is only the most obvious and obnoxious form of enslavement, and that the more subtle forms are in fact the harder to drive out because hidden.

On top of this recognition of the reality of wage slavery and the like, Thoreau also frequently rails against the money economy and the personal dead-end of commerce and trade. In *Walden* he bluntly writes that, 'trade curses every thing it handles; and though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business.' Similarly, in his essay 'Life without Principle', he writes that, 'The ways by which you may get money almost without exception lead downward. To have done anything by which you earned money *merely* is to have been truly idle or worse'.

Toward What End?

His disdain for slavery in all its forms and for the worship of money might seem sufficient grounds to claim Thoreau as a sort of proto-socialist. But I'm not sure if there is much point in drafting him to our cause. And there are many other political tendencies who seem to have him by the beard already. His essay 'On Civil Disobedience' alone has been seen as sufficient ground to fashion him the patron saint of non-violent resistance (despite his defense of the über-violent John Brown) or as a sort of anarchist or anarcho-capitalist.

If Thoreau isn't really a socialist or even a conscious anti-capitalist, what particular value might his works have for workers today? It seems to me that *Walden* can, first of all, foster and sustain a proud, rebellious spirit. It has an almost immediate spine-stiffening, morale-boosting effect, I find.

And as workers—facing the present age of austerity, precarious employment, and debt—we have almost no choice but to simplify our lives to some extent. We may not want to raise this effort to the level of a movement, since the capitalist class would embrace an ideology that makes a virtue out of the limited possibilities their system offers us. But nonetheless, as individual workers, we face the challenge of figuring out how to limit the amount of time we have to piss away in wage slavery. Thoreau encourages us to think about what is necessary and what is superfluous, freeing us at times from the purchasing mania that advertisers do their best to stimulate.

But the pursuit of a simpler and freer life brings us up against the ridiculous complexity and waste that characterizes capitalism. This system constitutes the very real limitation to our ability to achieve a genuine freedom. Thoreau poses many fruitful questions regarding what constitutes a meaningful life and labour, but the answers cannot be truly found until we have overcome an absurd social system supported by meaningless toil. That does not mean that it is pointless to simplify our life here and now; only that we have to set our sights on a higher goal as well to be truly realistic.

In other words, this brings us back to Thoreau's fundamental question: *Toward what end?* And socialists would say clearly in response: Beyond the dead-end of production for profit and toward a new society of meaningful activity to fulfill our human needs.

MICHAEL SCHAUERTE

The recent assassination of the Russian ambassador to Turkey reminds us that this particular form of political violence is still very much in use. Both states and those without states

('terrorists' or 'freedom fighters') believe this tactic still to be useful in furthering their political agendas. Perhaps a brief historical perspective on the phenomenon could help us decide whether they are correct in their continuing belief of its efficacy.

We begin with what is still, probably, the most infamous example of this form of homicide in western Europe's history – the assassination of Julius Caesar. Fearful of losing their power as a class in Rome a gang of patricians including Brutus and Cassius decided to end the meteoric political career of Julius Caesar. Under the banner of 'saving the republic' from a tyrant they stabbed him to death en-masse on the senate floor. Subsequently they were hunted down by Caesar's hatchet man Mark Anthony who himself was obliged to commit suicide by Caesar's nephew, later his adopted son, Augustus. Rome was then in the power of such successive madmen as Tiberius, Caligula and Nero. This particular assassination, then, was an unmitigated failure and Rome became a totalitarian state dominated for centuries by megalomaniacs. Could they have been successful? Historically Rome followed many other cultures in evolving from some form of a republic into a monarchy and it would appear that they were defying economic and political necessity which, in the end, defines historical progression. Ironically, because of the assassination and the subsequent power achieved by his descendants, Caesar's name was taken by the all of the rulers of Rome, and in its form of Czar and Kaiser together with the medieval title of 'Holy Roman Emperor' has been used ever since to designate political absolutism.

The term 'assassin' originated in Persia and later Syria and was used as a pejorative to describe a murderous Ismaili sect active in the middle ages. During the crusades the Franks encountered them and brought back the term to describe the similar internecine phenomenon in the West. The word may well have been used to describe our next victim of political murder in 1170 – Thomas Becket. Henry II of England had expected his friend to be an ally in the struggle for power with Rome when he made Becket archbishop of Canterbury. However this was not to be as Becket defended the autonomy of the church fiercely against his king's political machinations. Upon hearing one of Henry's most ferocious condemnations of his old friend four of his knights took it upon themselves to murder the 'troublesome priest'. Henry maintained that he was shocked by the killing and did penance as did Beckett's assassins who, ironically, ended up as crusaders attempting to find redemption for their sins. Thomas Becket was pronounced a martyr and canonised only two years after his death – giving valuable propaganda to the Pope and thus strengthening his power in England; yet another example of the failure of assassination to achieve the desired political aims.

It would appear that John Wilkes Booth's assassination of American president Abraham Lincoln was motivated primarily by revenge. As a supporter of the Confederacy he was outraged by Lincoln's support of voting rights for blacks and swore vengeance. Although the fifteenth amendment of 1870 did guarantee these rights it was repealed in 1894, something that would have delighted Booth. To the shame of

THE INFAMOUS HISTORY OF ASSASSINATION

the USA black people had to wait until 1965 before they again had the legal right to a vote in every State in the Union. Booth's act, then, had no impact on the course of US history. Karl Marx, on behalf of the First International,

had sent Lincoln a letter of congratulation on his re-election just before the assassination and was sincerely saddened by his death. No doubt this event featured in his fierce debate with Michael Bakunin and the anarchist element within the International who supported assassination as a valid political strategy. Marx won the debate but lost the International which split along an Anarchist/Socialist fault line. Since that time no socialist has seriously believed that assassination can change anything politically but it has remained something of an anarchist fantasy.

No historical assessment of assassination would be complete without a mention of the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria by Yugoslav nationalist Gavrilo Princip in 1914. The decaying Austrian empire took advantage of this event to rattle its rusty sabre one last time. In doing so it provided the catalyst that sparked the First World War in which all of the European powers vied for supremacy. Princip was motivated by his knowledge that the Austrians sought to prevent the pan Slavic nation that he so desired and as

part of the 'Black Hand' group he conspired to assassinate the Archduke. It could be argued that this event did contribute to the creation of Yugoslavia after the war in 1918. However the religious and cultural tensions within the peoples of that region led to its dissolution in 1991. A look at the ebb and flow of national borders in Europe during the twentieth century makes it obvious that nation states composed of federations of different ethnic and religious communities are often unstable and exist only courtesy of the strength or otherwise of the political

illusions used to manipulate the populations by ruling classes. Princip's anachronistic politics, and those who shared them, ensured the eventual doom of his dream.

In my own lifetime it was the assassination of President Kennedy that caused the most outrage. I remember, as a child, the sense of shock in my parents as they watched the drama unfold on TV. Without commenting on the numerous conspiracy theories that surround this event, it does seem possible it was more than the act of one isolated 'lone gunman' in the shape of Lee Harvey Oswald. We will never be entirely sure of his motives as he was himself murdered soon after the killing of the President; it may have been revenge for the aborted invasion of Cuba or merely an act on behalf of what he saw as an ideological struggle between the USSR and the USA. We do know that it made no difference to the momentum of US militarism and imperialism across the globe.

We also know that none of the above acts of violence made any significant difference to the course of history; and that they will continue to be politically irrelevant. Only the ideologically naive believe that individuals hold immense power and that to annihilate these people would change anything in the lives of the majority. In contrast if we can convince the majority of the illusion of this belief, in both the legitimacy of attempting to allocate power to single individuals and the possibility that they can wield it successfully, then we can assassinate one of the causes of political murder.

Wez



Early Bordiga and electoral activity

The second part of our series on the views of Amadeo Bordiga up to the 1917 Russian revolution.

In March and April 1913, the magazine *Avanguardia* published a series of articles by Bordiga entitled 'For the Theoretical Conception of Socialism'. In them he expressed his political vision:

'We should not be philosophers but men of action... the proletariat is still in search of its programme and it will not find it permanently until after a long series of struggles and inevitable mistakes committed in action. (...) We have a programme de facto: the abolition of private property and of the wages system. We have to pay attention to the deceptions of bourgeois thought and in particular to idealist forms that seek to distract the attention of the proletariat from the economic problems that it seeks to resolve with the violent suppression of their domination.'

If, on the one hand, this is a Marxist revolutionary position, on the other hand it has a strong taste of anarchist actionism. In a further *Avanguardia* article, in July 1913, Bordiga commented both on the recently translated book *Revolutionary Socialism* by the French revolutionary syndicalists Charles Albert and Jean Duchène and on an editorial on it by Mussolini in *Avanti*, the newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). According to Bordiga, the anarchists and syndicalists were too often criticized from the reformist point of view, that is, for rejecting legal revolution

in favour of violence. Instead, for him, the shortcomings of the anarchist and syndicalist movements were in how they wanted to reach their revolutionary aim; the anarchists were too abstract and the syndicalists were too simplistic in believing that the unions would be sufficient to achieve everything.

Bordiga disagreed with the authors that Marxism was a fatalistic doctrine. On the parliamentary tactic, a key element of what would become Bordiga's



Benito Mussolini : Editor of *Avanti*

future thought on the question can be discerned in this article. He agreed with criticism of the justifications the anarchists gave for abstentionism. On the other hand, he accepted Albert and Duchène's criticism that parliamentary action would suffocate any other activity, commenting that 'it cannot be denied that the facts seem to prove that'. But for him, at this time, it was a question of whether parliamentary and electoral activity was of use or not for the maximum programme of socialism. A few years later his answer was to be that it was not, with the same justification for this given by Albert and Duchène. It was from this that his abstentionism originated.

In November 1913 Bordiga discussed the elections that had just taken place:

'It is, in fact, undisputable that the conquests of Socialism, from the maximum to the immediate, must be a product of the



large masses, which form a collective consciousness of their own interests and of their own future. The large masses must be convinced that, to guarantee and effectively materialize those conquests, they should not abdicate their safety into the hands of a few executives; they should also not ask for help of any kind from the economically opposing class. The Socialist Party must nurture and spread this collective consciousness... Nobody can deny the truthfulness of the observation that a man obliged to do manual labour is inclined to delegate to others, to the intellectuals, the management and therefore the control of social life. Even nearly conscious masses tend to entrust the achievement of whatever aim they have to a man or a few men, whom they follow too blindly... We want to deduce from it that, in the current conditions, any form of class action – not only the elections, but also trade union action and even street uprisings – present the risk that the masses will give up actual control of their own interests and entrust it to a given number of "leaders".'

So at this time Bordiga favoured participation in elections as an opportunity for propagandising but at the same time he was concerned that elections could be used as a way for an intellectual elite to take control of the workers' movement. He already foresaw how easy it was for electoral activity to degenerate into mere vote-catching, 'to lose any aim which was not the numerical outcome'.

At the XIV National Congress of the PSI in Ancona in April 1914, Bordiga gave the leadership's political report and also a report on the Southern question. He spoke on the Party's tactic in 'administrative elections', i.e. elections to local and regional councils. He was for a policy of absolute intransigence against any type of coalition with bourgeois parties in the South as well as elsewhere in Italy, against the so-called blockists (*blocchisti*) who favoured electoral alliances with other parties. Despite the special conditions of the South of Italy, Bordiga invited the PSI to approach the question of the local and regional elections with the same political line everywhere in Italy, and 'to make socialist municipalities a weapon against the capitalist and bourgeois State'.

On 7 June 1914, to commemorate the Albertinian Statute (the constitutional charter of the Italian monarchy), republicans and anarchists in Ancona organized a demonstration where a large crowd gathered. The gendarmerie opened fire on the crowd killing three people. Workers all over Italy reacted to this violent act with street demonstrations. The reformist leaders of the union, the General Labour Confederation (Cgdl) were obliged to proclaim a mass strike. Writing in the 1960s Bordiga commented on what he regarded as a typical conclusion to an insurrection in Italian history:

'... on 12 June when state power and the bourgeoisie were in trouble, the Cgdl provided them one of its countless services; it ordered the end of the mass strike. It was straight from the anarchist and Sorelian syndicalist tradition, according to which the Union has the function of direct and violent action and the party the legal one.'

Though he never wrote about it, Bordiga's involvement in this action had personal consequences for him. He was dismissed from the State Railways where he worked as an engineer for taking part in a demonstration in Naples. He had published a short note in *Il Socialista* on 25 June in which he extended greetings to the rioters



The Senate House, Rome

in the name of the Neapolitan Section of the PSI.

When in his article 'Democracy and Socialism' Bordiga stated that socialism 'established itself as the solemn condemnation of the historical failure of the democratic formula, and of the deceits that this contains' he was referring to bourgeois democracy. He wrote that democracy (i.e. bourgeois democracy) 'sees in the representative system the means to solve any problem of collective interest; we see in it the mask of a social oligarchy that uses the deceit of political equality in order to keep the workers oppressed'. In a key passage in this series of articles he wrote about what socialism means:

'... socialism means thinking that today, based on an examination

achieved for workers at the municipal level should not be ignored, the role of the party remained one of propaganda, proselytism and preparation for the final clash of classes.

CESCO

(Correction: last month we gave the date of the founding of the PSI as 1882. This was a misprint for 1892. The word 'Instrigeant' in the title was also an error - it should have read 'intransigent')

(Next month: Bordiga and the First World War)



Marxists under the bed

ANYONE READING the *Times* over the end of the year period could be forgiven for thinking that the paper was waging a witch-hunt against 'Marxists'. An article by Philip Collins, once Tony Blair's speechwriter, on 16 December was headed 'Ministers must stand and fight RMT Marxists'. Another, on 3 January, by Melanie Phillips, former *Daily Mail* columnist (and it shows), on Obama was subtitled 'The outgoing President is poised to return to his Marxist roots and lead opposition to Trump.'

What was the basis of these claims? Collins's argument was that the current series of strikes on Southern Rail was not an ordinary trade union dispute over workers' terms and conditions of employment but a political strike against the government. He cited talk by some of the union's officials about strikes to bring down the government, one of Arthur Scargill's illusions. Even if this was the union's official position (which it wasn't) this would not be 'Marxism'. The view

that trade unions should take industrial action to overthrow the government is a syndicalist position, not one Marx held. He always stressed the need to win control of political power, via the ballot box if possible, as a preliminary to ending capitalism.

Collins also pointed to the fact that the RMT has supported TUSC, a Trotskyist front organisation. At least those behind TUSC do describe themselves as 'Marxists', even though they aren't. Trotskyism is a fundamental departure from Marx's own views and TUSC's policies are just Old Labour.

Melanie Phillips's case is even weaker. She can't even cite anybody who even claimed to be a Marxist. Her argument goes like this: Obama used to be a community activist; Saul Alinsky was a community activist; Alinsky was a Marxist; therefore Obama was a Marxist. The logical fallacy is glaring, but one of the premises is not even true. Alinsky never claimed to be a socialist, let alone a Marxist.

But what is a Marxist anyway? Marx himself of course once famously said that he wasn't a Marxist. The term originated in the dispute in the 1870s within the International Working Men's Association. Marx's opponents in the dispute dubbed those who took his side 'Marxists'. They

of the existing economic and social conditions, a class action is possible, which aims to destroy capitalism and substitute it with a new social order. Acting as socialists means to seek to spread the consciousness of such a possibility in an ever growing number of proletarians and with the greatest simultaneity possible in all countries and nations. Whoever, even if they recognize that the destruction of capitalism is a good thing, does not think that this is the moment to act but believes that it is better to first solve other problems, is not a socialist.'

In this series of articles Bordiga continued to support the 'municipalist' thesis that workers should aim to win control of municipalities through elections, close to the argument of Mussolini in *Avanti*. At this point, for Bordiga, while what might be able to be

achieved for workers at the municipal level should not be ignored, the role of the party remained one of propaganda, proselytism and preparation for the final clash of classes.

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retorted by calling them 'Bakuninists'. Some accepted the description 'Marxist', and, despite Marx, it stuck.

A Marxist is not a dogmatic follower of everything Marx wrote or did, but someone who shares his approach to history and economics and his insistence on the need to win political control before attempting to end capitalism and bring in communism (as Marx preferred to call socialism). In this sense, we would call ourselves Marxists, although our case rests on the facts, not on what Marx said, and stands irrespective of what Marx may or may not have said and even if he had never been born.

We wouldn't want to claim to be the only 'Marxists'. There are historians, such as Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm, who have brilliantly applied the materialist conception of history, but only to history. When it came to applying the same method to contemporary society they had a blind spot, believing that Russia was socialist or had been on the way to socialism, whereas the exploitative, class-divided, state-capitalist society there had nothing in common with what Marx envisaged as the next stage beyond capitalism. But one thing is certain, neither the RMT leaders nor Obama are in any way Marxist.



Views On The News

WHEN *GOGGLEBOX*'S producers came up with the show's format, they'd found the Holy Grail of television shows: cheap and straightforward to churn

out, but still massively popular. Netting four million viewers is quite good going for a programme that any of us can make just by putting a mirror next to our own TV. It's no surprise, then, that a production company with a dearth of original ideas has nicked *Gogglebox*'s format in the hope of also nicking some of its viewers. The result is BBC2's *Common Sense*, which features 'real people' (as opposed to what? Surreal people? Androids? Holograms?) having contrived chats about the previous week's news stories with a camera shoved in front of them while Ruth Jones narrates. And that's it.

The participants have been picked for 'their sharp wit and humorous take on life', but also reflect the stereotypes of 'real people' which the media easily falls back on. So, we have Cockney wideboys, cuddly grannies, rosy-cheeked butchers and



poshos in pin-striped suits, although others, thankfully, are less obviously chosen to represent a tick-

box group, such as the male Mancunian / Vietnamese nail technicians. They're all there, really, just to open their mouths and let the words fall out.

In the first episode, we hear their views on populism (mostly bewilderment, but defined by one of the pin-striped suited poshos as 'a word used by people who hate democracies functioning effectively'), climate change ('we've got icebergs floating all over the place now'), the Queen being briefly mistaken for an intruder in Buckingham Palace's gardens ('if he had shot her ... I bet they would have made a court case out of it') and the Prime Minister taking yonks to say anything more substantial about Britain leaving the European Union than 'Brexit means Brexit' ('people are calling her flippin' Theresa Maybe'). There's a healthy cynicism about Tony Blair attempting to 'worm his way back into British politics to make up for Iraq' alongside trying to 'smarm his way' into being the 'President of the European Union, among other things. If not, he wants to be God'. Inevitably, Donald Trump's tweets come up, and whether he'll take notice of any of his advisers brave enough to ask him to tone his mad rants down ('Otherwise they'll shoot him').

Most of the participants, having probably watched *Gogglebox*, know the score and realise that witty banter is the order of the day, even if they don't always deliver. Their chats are edited down into short exchanges, with the assumption that us viewers have the attention span of a bluebottle. Random sentences are punctuated by annoying plinky-plonky music, which somehow sounds like the producers sneering. And rather insultingly, the characters are introduced in exactly the same way as those in *Little Britain* are – with them looking at the camera while it pans slowly across them as jingoistic music plays. As the reviewer in the *Telegraph* asked, are we supposed to be laughing with or at the participants?

Common Sense reminds us that television has a condescending, awkward way of presenting 'real people' – i.e. any of us – on screen. The smarmy title gives it away, with the snobbish connotations of the word 'common'. It's as if the

producers are looking at 'real people' from outside, like they're staring at goldfish in a tank and prodding the glass every now and then. An extreme example of this tendency is, of course, the odious *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, which turns desperation into a spectator sport. And when 'real people' dare to think they've got talent and try their luck on *The X-Factor* and its ilk, those that can't get remoulded into what's likely to sell gig tickets and downloads get their dreams chewed up and spat out in their faces. All these shows exploit as well as present the 'real people' who appear on them. Even though they ostensibly give us proles an opportunity to express ourselves, they also reveal bourgeois attitudes about the working class. It's not that programme-makers are necessarily deliberately setting out to do this; they're just making a living by producing what the market supposedly wants, like the rest of us. However, the patronising whiff around series which 'showcase' 'real' or 'ordinary' people does make you wonder if they're produced by people who think they're a cut above. At least the internet gives many of us the opportunity to broadcast ourselves if we want to, in whatever way we prefer, without television's distorting lens. If we want to make a YouTube video giving our opinions on the link between earthquakes and fracking we can, and equally we can make one listing our favourite Harry Potter books. Or, if we really want to engage with 'real people's' views, we could just as well switch off our screens and start a conversation ourselves.

MIKE FOSTER

The Environment

Summer School 2017

21st – 23rd July

Fircroft College, Birmingham

These days, concerns about the environment tend to get pushed into the background by issues like Brexit, Trump's presidency and ongoing austerity measures. But climate change, pollution and extinctions don't go away just because the headlines are filled with other events. 2016 was the warmest year on record, with implications for sea levels and habitats; more and more waste is produced for future generations to deal with, and many hundreds of species continue to become extinct every year.

Legislation places some restrictions on the use of dangerous materials, hunting and waste disposal, for example. However, legislators can only work within a system which is structured to safeguard the interests of the wealthy elite, rather than everyone. And of course laws don't always prevent environmentally-damaging methods from being used if they save or make money. Capitalism turns the natural world into a resource to be exploited for a profit.

The Socialist Party argues that the environment can only be managed responsibly if society as a whole is managed co-operatively and in everyone's interests. If our industries and services were owned and run in common, then we would be able to produce what we need and want in the most reasonable, sustainable way.

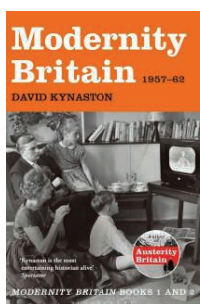
Our weekend of talks and discussions looks at the current state of the environment, and its prospects for the future we make for it.

Full residential cost (including accommodation and meals Friday evening to Sunday afternoon) is **£100**. The concessionary rate is **£50**. Day visitors are welcome, but please book in advance.

For more details, see spgb.net/summerschool2017 or e-mail spgbschool@yahoo.co.uk.

Gradually Modernising

David Kynaston: *Modernity Britain, 1957–62*. Bloomsbury £14.99.



This is the latest in Kynaston's massive history of Britain from 1945 to 1979. It is a detailed combination of political, social, cultural and economic history, with a lot of reference to and quotations from autobiographies and contemporary diaries.

1957 saw Harold Macmillan becoming Prime Minister; John Lennon met Paul McCartney for the first time; the causal link between smoking and cancer was confirmed; ball-by-ball radio commentaries on cricket Tests began; and there was a national bus strike. As the years passed, *Blue Peter*, *Coronation Street* and *Z Cars* started on TV, supermarkets became much more numerous, betting shops and commercial bingo halls opened, and many pubs and cinemas closed. In 1962 the Crazy Gang had their last performance, Accrington Stanley were wound up, the Beatles got a contract with EMI, and the centenary of 'The Blaydon Races' was celebrated.

Two well-known political quotations bookended the period. In July 1957 Macmillan announced that 'most of our people have never had it so good', and in June 1962 Harold Wilson stated that 'the Labour Party is a moral crusade or it is nothing'. It is hard to imagine claims along these lines being made today.

Living standards improved for most people. Between 1951 and 1958 the average earnings for industrial workers had grown by over 20 percent in real terms. In the second half of 1957, 56 percent of adults owned a TV set and 12 percent a fridge, and by 1960 82 percent of homes had a TV and 21 percent a fridge. Yet plenty of people still lived in poverty, below National Assistance levels. There were massive programmes of slum clearance and the building of flats (such as Park Hill in Sheffield and the high-rise blocks in Glasgow), but in 1960 there were still 850,000 homes categorised as unfit and slum clearance rates were running decades behind the plans. This was part of more general moves towards town planning, the restructuring of town and city centres and the building of big road schemes, such as Birmingham's Inner Ring Road.

A few women were becoming prominent, for instance as journalists or newsreaders. But it was generally assumed that most married women would stay at home rather than work, and women on the whole earned far less than men and were more likely to

be doing unskilled jobs. Marriage was the norm, and less than three percent of households were lone parents with dependent children. While many men expected their wives to just cook and clean, 'the sociological evidence was mounting that marriages as a whole were becoming more companionate.' The oral contraceptive pill could be prescribed from the end of 1961, but only to married women.

Immigration was a live issue, though in 1958 there were just 165,000 non-white immigrants in Britain. The Notting Hill riots that summer were 'the most serious civil unrest of the decade', as mobs of white youths rampaged through the streets. Many ads for rented flats stated 'No coloured people', and there was discrimination in employment as well. By 1961 it was being claimed that prejudice against West Indians in Birmingham was leading to 'neighbourhood segregation'; there were no more than 35,000 West Indians in the city.

The Conservative election victory in October 1959 was their third in a row, and led to many arguments within the Labour Party. It was claimed that nationalisation had been the most damaging issue, and Hugh Gaitskell reiterated that it was not intended to take every private firm or small shop into state ownership. In 1957 a motion on unilateral nuclear disarmament had been defeated at a Labour conference; Kynaston says that this was the moment when Labour and 'radical' ideas began to become detached from each other, but it needs to be asked how radical Labour had ever been. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was set up in early 1958, and the Committee of 100 in 1960.

This is a very wide-ranging history of the period, but it has little to say about inequality and the lives of the richest people in Britain.

PB

Sorting it Out?

***Against Elections: The Case for Democracy.* By David Van Reybrouck. Bodley Head. 2016. £9.99**



Genuinely fascinating and thought-provoking new books seem hard to find, though Van Reybrouck seems to have produced one. In the current climate of political cynicism and apathy, the main title of 'Against Elections'

could be interpreted as something beyond populism and even a call for fascism, but this is very far from being the case. His main argument is that it is not democracy

itself that is the problem, but the way it is practised – almost exclusively through the form of competitive elections that produce self-reinforcing political elites.

Van Reybrouck diagnoses the malaise at the heart of the crisis engulfing representative democracies across many parts of the globe and voter dissatisfaction with elected politicians and parties. He points out that political parties in most Western democracies are now regarded as being the most corrupt organizations legally existing and that contempt for conventional party politicians appears to be at an all-time high too. He also discusses some of the alternatives mentioned to systems of representative democracy, such as direct democracy, which has influenced movements like Occupy and the Indignados. The Five Star movement in Italy, despite its populist flavour, has also grappled with these issues and argued strongly for other forms of democratic consultation and for limits on political terms served by elected representatives.

But few have questioned the usefulness of elections themselves as a ubiquitous part of the democratic process. One of the most fascinating parts of the book is where Van Reybrouck traces the way in which 'democracy' and 'elections' have now become synonymous. In reality, throughout the history of the last 3,000 years or so, elections have just been one way in which democratic will has been expressed. Another method has largely fallen by the wayside – democracy through sortition, or the drawing of lots. In most countries this is regarded as acceptable for choosing juries making decisions about legal cases, but isn't typically used otherwise. Van Reybrouck discusses how this situation came about, as the democracy practiced in ancient city states like Athens, or even many of the Renaissance city states such as Venice and Aragon, included very pronounced elements of sortition alongside elements of elections.

Furthermore, it is clear that many of the philosophers of the Enlightenment were strong advocates of sortition too. Montesquieu, one of the most significant influences on modern constitutional theory and nation states claimed that 'Voting by *lot* is in the nature of democracy; voting by *choice* is in the nature of aristocracy . . . the casting of lots is a way of election that distresses no one; it leaves to each citizen a reasonable expectation of serving his country'. Similar views were advanced by Rousseau in his *Social Contract*.

However, to ruling elites (both aristocratic and in the rising capitalist class) sortition was dangerous and random and could not guarantee that those entrusted with power and responsibility

would be suitable for the role. Hence the emphasis on elections, initially with very limited electorates of those who could be 'trusted' – most typically men of property. But of course the granting and widening of democratic rights was a protracted process that was not merely something handed down by the ruling elites free and gratis – in most instances it had to be struggled for, eventually by the majority class of wage and salary earners, and it would be interesting research to see how and why sortition (as opposed to election) was relegated in importance by workers' movements struggling for democracy.

Van Reybrouck contends that the reintroduction of sortition within Western democracies currently in poor health would be a way of reinvigorating the democratic process and, in doing so, also potentially undermine the anti-democratic movements currently coming out of

the shadows. He may have a limited point here, but the hierarchical and competitive nature of capitalist society mitigates against this working in all but a few selected areas – recently sortition has been used as part of consultative processes on constitutional issues in Ireland, Iceland and the Netherlands, though with mixed success.

As in ancient Athens, sortition works best when combined with forms of elections that can produce a range of competent candidates for given roles, with sortition and fixed terms of office providing the genuinely wide representation (and randomness) that stifles the emergence of elites. The Socialist Party of Great Britain already uses sortition in a limited way as part of its internal democratic practice and it seems likely that socialist society would be the most obvious type of democratic social

system that would enable sortition and elections to work hand-in-hand effectively. This is because socialism – as a system of common ownership and democratic control – would be a society without classes and elites, without leaders and the led. More work is no doubt needed on this element of socialist democracy, and that can be developed and refined by the wider socialist movement as it grows over time.

Van Reybrouck has produced an important work, but not one that will necessarily save capitalism's rather limited and somewhat spurious democracy from itself. It is, however, of clear use and interest to socialists as principled believers in the most scrupulous of democratic practices as the cornerstone of a genuinely egalitarian society.

DAP

OBITUARY

Victor Vanni

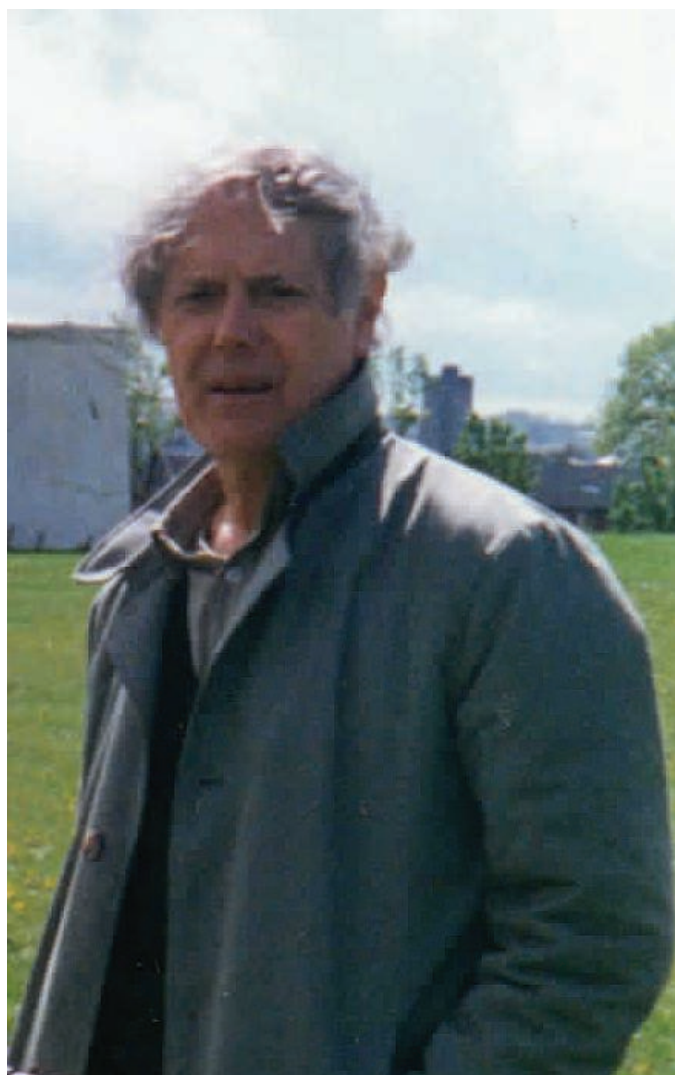
It is with sorrow that we mark the death of Vic Vanni, a Party member for more than fifty years and an unflagging stalwart of our Glasgow Branch. He was 86.

The son of Italian immigrants who settled in Glasgow and had a fish and chip shop, Vic worked all of his life as a sheet metal worker in the Clyde shipyards, where he was probably its only *Guardian* reader. He joined the Labour Party soon after the 1959 General Election and became extremely active on their behalf, with prospects of becoming a parliamentary candidate. In the following year, however, he fortuitously came across an SPGB outdoor meeting and set about persuading our members to support the Labour Party and the CND movement. In subsequent encounters, our arguments against such a sterile course so impressed him that he abandoned Labourism and eventually joined the Socialist Party in 1963. Since that time, he devoted all of his energies to Party activity, as an outdoor speaker, lecturer, writer and branch organiser. Vic addressed public meetings throughout Britain, from Aberdeen to Bristol, Norwich to Bolton, and spoke in London's Hyde Park, Earls Court and Lincoln's Inn Fields as well as in Boston and New York when visiting American socialists. A Party candidate and agent in General and Scottish Parliament elections, he was also a Glasgow Branch delegate at fifty consecutive annual Party Conferences.

Vic was known latterly for a tendency to pour tepid to cold water on what he viewed as fanciful optimism about, or proposals for, the advancement of socialism, which made his commitment and integrity all the more admirable. The only thing wrong with our case, he insisted, is that it has too few adherents. He always made a point of speaking to new Party members or writing them letters of encouragement, as well as occasionally posting missives of gentle admonition to those of longer standing who should have known better. Where he lately bought his typewriter ribbons remains a mystery. While his life was the Party, he did have abiding enthusiasms elsewhere: his knowledge of Scottish, English and continental football was extensive (he could name most players in London teams of the mid-1950s, when he briefly lived in the capital); he became an avid devotee of speedway's Glasgow Tigers; and he was a regular cinema-goer familiar with both continental and American films, being especially interested in Hollywood and its

industrial relations. A convivial, unassuming and self-disciplined man of routine (explained, perhaps in part, by his conscripted time in the army as Sergeant Vanni), it is impossible to forget him putting in his forthright two pennies' worth at Party gatherings. All members will be hard-pressed to emulate Vic's example, which is his singular legacy.

MT



50 Years Ago

Target Hanoi



THE START of this year was considerably dampened by the flood of crocodile tears provoked by the admitted bombing of civilians in Hanoi.

The tears flowed strongly as the eye witness accounts came in, especially those from Harrison Salisbury, assistant

managing editor of the *New York Times*. Harrison's reports also provoked a slight, but distinct, surprise that an American newspaper man should actually tell the truth about the results of his countrymen's military exploits.

It is difficult to imagine anyone really believing the Pentagon's assurances that only military targets were being bombed. This is a well worn fiction of modern war; even the RAF tried it in the last war, until the evidence to the contrary became

overwhelming.

In any case, why the indignation about civilian deaths in wartime? The "advance" of capitalism's warmaking machine has brought everyone into the front line.

War is now very much a social business, with many civilians playing a more important part in the war effort than many men in uniform. It is also important for a side to break the morale of the other's civilians — usually by bombing or blockade.

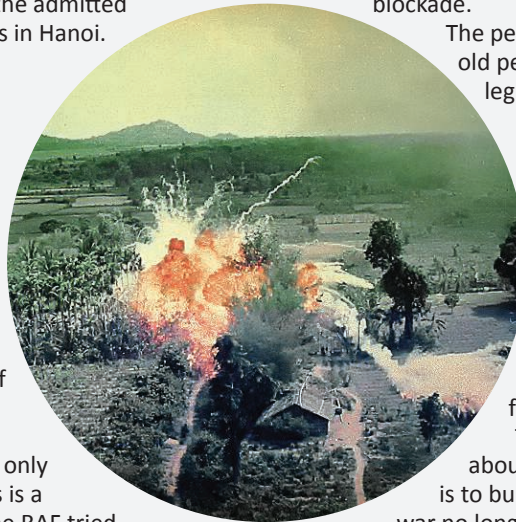
The people of Hanoi, then — its children, its old people, its hospital patients — are all legitimate targets.

Does this sound callous? War is never an agreeable business and those who complain about its effects while they support the system which produces it, or those who demonstrate about the military activities of only one side, they are the callous ones.

As long as capitalism lasts there will be no end to war and we may expect it to become more and more fearsome.

The solution is not to wave banners about one incident or one aspect of war. It is to build a new society in which the cause of war no longer exists.

(*Socialist Standard*, February 1967)



ACTION REPLAY

The January Sales

LAST MONTH, The English Premier League winter transfer window opened from 1 January to 31 January. Joey Barton transferred to Burnley; Gabriel Jesus to Manchester City, and Oscar's £60 million departure from Chelsea to a Chinese football club grabbed the most attention in sports news.

According to the EPL, the present system was introduced in 2002/3, as a compromise agreement with the European Commission about how the transfer system worked and how to preserve contractual stability for the player and the club, while allowing movement at prescribed times during the year (transfer windows). The alternative was to bring football in line with most other industries where contracts were not enforceable or liable for compensation, i.e. notice periods being served and players moving at will (*Bosman* ruling). The football authorities across Europe felt this would undermine the 'footballing economy' by reducing incentives for clubs' investment in younger players.

Some managers including Arsène Wenger feel the transfer window should close when the Premier League season begins. In an ideal world the EPL might support this initiative; however football

operates within a European and global market, so if transfer windows closed in England, witnessing Spanish, German or Italian rivals continue to trade and pursue their transfer targets with impunity would put English football at a disadvantage.

Effectively English football clubs operate within a market economy that buys and sells commodities (in this case individual footballers). A striker's worth is mainly influenced by goals scored, defenders are rated by defensive qualities and goalkeepers by 'clean sheets'. Despite the high wages some players earn, economically they are 'for sale' in the same way as pork belly, rice yields and the futures markets within a capitalist world.

To make the point, compare football's economic activity with the recent January sales. In the UK many shoppers descended on high streets the night before the sales took place, tucked into sleeping bags in order to be the first crossing the shop floor in the hope of securing bargains. Among those offering big reductions were familiar names like Harrods, Selfridges, Liberty, House of Fraser, Next, and Marks & Spencer.

Myf Ryan of Westfield shopping centres said the January sales remained a 'huge attraction'. Westfield operates two large shopping centres in west and east London and she anticipated

exceptionally busy days yet again, due to the excellent retail offers and special deals with over 50 percent off by many of our retailers.

The Next fashion chain opened at 6:00 am and at one of its stores on Oxford Street in London's West End, 600 people queued. In Birmingham, some shoppers had been queuing since 02:30 am outside the Bullring branch of Selfridges, with store deputy manager Sam Watts estimating some 2,000 were queuing by opening time. Crowds of up to 150,000 descended on Sheffield's Meadowhall Centre.

Let's not forget the sales bonanza from shopping online: according to the data firm Experian and online retailing trade association IMRG, internet shoppers were expected to spend £748m on Boxing Day, (£519k) a minute. They also predicted some 167 million visits to online retail sites, up 29 percent on 2013.

So we see, that whether it's footballers, fur coats, washing machines or flat screen televisions, the people and products bought and sold in our present society are mediated by the market. Under capitalism, we learn the price of everything but not its intrinsic value.

Hasten the day that socialism (a world system) arrives so that as a society we produce for social use and not for profit and the supply of goods and services are determined by the needs and wants of the people and not the realisation of profit at our expense by the capitalist class.

KEVIN

The ABC of Capitalism

'We live in a capitalist world. Capitalism defines our society, economy, politics and culture. However, it's not a school subject in the UK or any other capitalist country.' So runs the publicity for an exhibition 'The ABC of Capitalism' by Riiko Sakkinen, currently on display at Bury Art Museum, which is also described as containing 'the School of Capitalism for kids'. This sounds potentially intriguing, but it all turns out to be a bit of a let-down.

The exhibition has a lengthy list of varieties of capitalism, including state capitalism, but no explanation of any of these. A map of the world states that there are 204 capitalist countries, and only two that are not capitalist, Cuba and

North Korea, but there is no account of why this is the case or what system these countries have instead. 'Freedom is a Free Economy', announces a slogan, but this is meaningless as there is no explanation of what counts as a free economy. There is a display of supposed Heroes of Capitalism, from Adam Smith and Henry Ford to Thatcher, Reagan and Deng Xiaoping. A single out-of-context quote from each of these is used, but nothing is said to show why they are considered 'heroes'. Pinochet is one of them, but it is not stated that he was a dictator who had his opponents tortured and executed. There is no reference anywhere to two of the defining characteristics of capitalism, wages and profit. But in a sense there would be no point in having a school curriculum along such lines, as the social and economic status quo is already implicit in education and the media, anyway.

Does a look at Sakkinen's website

(www.riikosakkinen.com) help at all? Sort of, as it says a bit about his Turbo Realism movement. But consider these quotes from it: Turbo Realism 'is against the globalized capitalism and all other capitalisms' but it 'will be against the post-capitalism, and we will be the first artists interned in its camps' and its goal 'is to support the revolutionary forces in the society to establish a global socialist dictatorship'. Probably he is being deliberately provocative, disagreeing with himself, advocating one position and its opposite too.

The exhibition states that many people do not understand capitalism, but it is not clear that Sakkinen understands it either, and little that is said here will help. It may be claimed that art need not spell everything out, but it surely needs to say something more than is done in this ABC.
PB

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation

of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

Meetings

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

EC Meeting

Saturday **4 March 2017**, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN. Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

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No gods! No masters!

'CREATIONIST KEN Ham is very angry at the *Washington Post* for incorrectly reporting that he believes dinosaurs were wiped out by the biblical flood described in the story of Noah' (rawstory.com, 1 January). According to Ham, they joined Noah on his ark and the *Post* should get their facts right! The standard atheist approach to such nonsense is to use real facts. Against the belief in an all-knowing/loving/powerful god/s, an atheist is right to wield facts such as humans are 90 percent bacteria, see less than 1 percent of the light spectrum, have sub-optimal plumbing (breathing, eating, excretory and reproductive) and are programmed to die. The atheist could reasonably add that at least 40 percent of animal species are parasites, and over 99 percent of all species that ever lived are extinct. Socialists, unlike atheists, fight against Creationists like Ham and clerics in general not because of their belief in God but because priests of all religions have been, in all phases of history, the allies of the ruling classes in keeping the masses bent under the yoke. Churches have crowned the peoples' oppressors, and crucified our forebears. New Age religion is merely the old repackaged in a new, modern form. Rather than obeying a priest, they choose the form of our own mental domination and the flight from reality into a magical world.

Universal Freedom

The concluding paragraph of *Money for nothing: What universal basic income means for you* reads: 'I realize that to some, basic income sounds like a *Black Mirror* episode with millions of people sitting on their couches all day, bored, listless, and up to no good. But based on what I've read so far, I believe that if it's



handled correctly, it could be a positive step forward in the age-old journey to realize our true human potential' (mashable.com, 4 January). But, of course, the capitalist class have enjoyed for centuries an unearned income - money for nothing! - that is anything but basic. For the 99 percent UBI is nothing more than a redistribution of crumbs, promoted by reformists of the left and right.

Looking backwards

When it comes to predicting the future, economists are marginally better than clairvoyants but far worse than meteorologists. 'It is official. Figures for the past six months show that the forecasts of instant Brexit catastrophe from the Treasury and the Bank of England were garbage. The Bank's economist, Andrew Haldane, admitted yesterday that it was a repeat of the failure to predict the 2008 crash. It was another 'Michael Fish moment', when meteorologists failed to forecast the 1987 hurricane' (theguardian.com, 6 January). 85 years ago we published

the pamphlet *Why Capitalism Will Not Collapse*. The economic outlook back then appeared even worse than it is today: 'We are in the midst of a crisis that is world-wide. Every country feels its ravages. Millions and millions of workers are unemployed and in acute poverty. Everywhere there is discontent and a feeling of insecurity, and the prestige of even the strongest of governments has been shaken. All sorts of emergency measures have been hastily adopted, but the depression still continues. Working men and women who normally ignore such questions, are now asking why the crisis has occurred, what will be its outcome, and whether it could have been avoided. In some minds there is a fear, and in others a hope, that the industrial crisis may bring the present system of society down in ruins, and make way for another.' We warned those who said that capitalism would imminently collapse that their claim was groundless. History has vindicated this position. There will be no need for economists in a socialist world where production is for use not profit and distribution according to self-defined need rather than having sufficient money. They along with former bankers, expropriated capitalists and tax consultants will join clairvoyants, homeopaths, lawyers and priests looking for something more meaningful to do with their lives.

Dustbin of history

'One Nation candidate Shan Ju Lin has labelled gay people 'abnormal', saying that they 'should be treated as patients' and 'need to receive treatments' (news.com.au, 7 January). Unscientific prejudice like this serves the interests of the status quo by dividing our class and delaying the socialist revolution.

FREE LUNCH

